

Congress Must Act Before Disaster Relief Fund Runs into Red

Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) and Congressman Paul Tonko (D-NY) today led 77 U.S. House members in calling on House leaders to schedule an immediate up or down vote on the emergency funding bill passed last week by the U.S. Senate to provide assistance to those affected by Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee and other natural disasters. This bipartisan legislation, which passed with 62 votes in the Senate, would provide \$6.9 billion in emergency funding for ongoing disaster relief efforts across the country and prevent FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund from running into the red.

"The New Yorkers I represent don't want to see political games and half measures," said Hinchey. "The Senate legislation is comprehensive and fulfills the federal government's obligations to small businesses, families and local governments affected by Irene, Lee and other natural disasters. The House legislation falls well short and would require a complicated mess of additional bills and offsets that are a recipe for gridlock. We can't afford to play politics with this critical issue. Too many people in New York and across the country are counting on us. Congress has always provided the funding necessary to deal with natural disasters of this magnitude and this time should be no different."

"This is a time for effective government, not games and gridlock," said Tonko. "It has been three weeks since communities in Upstate New York and across the Northeast were first hit by devastating flooding. Since then, many have lost everything they own. The House legislation falls short of what our families need to rebuild their homes. It ignores disaster relief programs at USDA that should be guiding the recovery of our farmers and rural communities, but are hamstrung by backlogs and insufficient funds. The Senate bill gets us closer to where we need to be. There is no reason to keep this legislation from receiving a vote. With 48 states that have been impacted by federally declared emergencies this year, any Member – Republican or Democrat – should support allowing a vote on this bill."

President Obama has requested an additional \$5.1 billion in funding for FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund, including \$500 million for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2011 which ends September 30, and \$4.6 billion for FY 2012. The U.S. Senate legislation meets the president's request of \$5.1 billion and provides an additional \$1.8 billion in funding for disaster recovery programs at other agencies. The House legislation provides a little over half that amount, with \$3.65 billion for disaster recovery, including approximately \$1 billion for FY 2011, divided between FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and an additional \$2.65 billion for FY 2012.

The 75 co-signers of the letter include: Gary Ackerman (D-NY), Rob Andrews (D-NJ), Lou Barletta (R-PA), Tim Bishop (D-NY), Robert Brady (D-PA), Corrine Brown (D-FL), G.K. Butterfield (D-NC), Russ Carnahan (D-MO), David Cicilline (D-RI), Yvette Clarke (D-NY), Steve Cohen (D-TN), Gerald Connolly (D-VA), John Conyers (D-MI), Joseph Crowley (D-NY), Danny Davis (D-IL), Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Theodore Deutch (D-FL), Lloyd Doggett (D-TX), Michael Doyle (D-PA), Eliot Engel (D-NY), Bob Filner (D-CA), Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Janice Hahn (D-CA), Alcee Hastings (D-FL), Brian Higgins (D-NY), James Himes (D-CT), Kathy Hochul (D-NY), Tim Holden (D-PA), Rush Holt (D-NJ), Michael Honda (D-CA), Steve Israel (D-NY), Jesse Jackson (D-IL), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), Hank Johnson (D-GA), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Sander Levin (D-MI), David Loebsack (D-IA), Nita Lowey (D-NY), Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), Edward Markey (D-MA), Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), Jim McDermott (D-WA), James McGovern (D-MA), Gregory Meeks (D-NY), Brad Miller (D-NC), James Moran (D-VA), Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), John Olver (D-MA), William Owens (D-NY), Gary Peters (D-MI), Charles Rangel (D-NY), Laura Richardson (D-CA), Cedric Richmond (D-LA), Steven Rothman (D-NJ), Tim Ryan (D-OH), Adam Schiff (D-CA), Allyson Schwartz (D-PA), Jose Serrano (D-NY), Albio Sires (D-NJ), Louise McIntosh Slaughter (D-NY), Fortney Pete Stark (D-CA), Bennie Thompson (D-MS), Timothy Walz (D-MN), Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL), Melvin Watt (D-NC), Lynn Woolsey (D-CA), Peter Welch (D-VT), Bill Pascrell (D-NJ), George Miller (D-CA), Dennis Kucinich (D-OH), Donna Christiansen (D-VI), Sam Farr (D-CA), Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (D-MP) and Mazie Hirono (D-HI). The full text of the letter to Boehner and Cantor follows. A PDF is [here](#).

September 20, 2011

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Eric Cantor
Office of the Majority Leader
H-329, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner and Majority Leader Cantor:

We write to urge you to bring the Senate's recently passed disaster assistance package to the House floor for a vote immediately.

As you know, the Senate passed legislation to provide \$6.9 billion in needed funds for ongoing disaster relief efforts across the country. This plan, passed with bipartisan support, takes a more comprehensive approach and will make significantly more emergency aid available to Americans in need than the current House proposal, which does not provide sufficient resources needed to respond to Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee, and the wildfires in Texas, let alone other disasters that may occur in the next two months.

The perilously low level of funding available in FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund has been widely reported. The Fund had \$377 million remaining as of Wednesday, September 15, and will run out before the end of the month. It is imperative that Congress responds immediately. FEMA is currently only funding immediate needs, focusing on damage from recent disasters. Assistance has been postponed to communities that have suffered from past disasters and FEMA cannot begin full recovery efforts in areas recently devastated because of the lack of adequate resources. Recovery takes long enough without these unnecessary delays. Uncertainty regarding emergency aid certainly does not help our constituents and communities rebuild.

In addition to replenishing FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund, the Senate bill also includes necessary funding for a number of other equally critical recovery programs under the jurisdiction of USDA, HUD and the Department of Commerce. These programs, which were not addressed in the House proposal, operate alongside FEMA to help farmers who lost harvests and livestock, families who lost homes, and communities that lost jobs and small businesses.

While final funding decisions are yet to be made for Fiscal Year 2012, additional agriculture disaster assistance is required now in order to clear out backlogs in USDA's disaster programs and ensure funding reaches areas affected by Irene and Lee in a timely manner. As of September 15, 2011, the USDA estimated \$77 million in outstanding Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) requests, \$73 million in Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) needs this fiscal year and a wait-list of \$187.5 million for the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP). Many farms in affected regions do not have crop insurance, making these some of the only programs they can access after such disasters.

The families that remain without homes in shelters are not interested in seeing more gridlock in Washington. The farmers who lost their crops and livestock do not care about debates over

deficits and offsets. The entrepreneurs who lost their small businesses cannot afford to see us play politics. Whenever a natural disaster has occurred in the past, this government has come to the aid and assistance of those affected. Under the Bush Administration, this Congress was asked for and supplied supplemental disaster relief funding eight times and often passed these bills with overwhelming bipartisan support. This time should be no different.

We have an obligation to fulfill to our fellow citizens. FEMA and other federal agencies need the entirety of the Senate's bill to help suffering Americans today. Please prevent disaster aid from getting caught up in budget brinksmanship by bringing the bill passed by the Senate up for a vote.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey
Member of Congress

Paul Tonko
Member of Congress

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